



*Tupuna and Nuuroa with a Puta Tupuna* (ancient manuscript with genealogical lineages), by Marie-Hélène Villierme (French Polynesia), 2010.

Digital print of a medium format film (silver halide), 60 cm x 60 cm.

Image courtesy of the artist (<http://www.visagesdepolynesie.com/>).

Marie-Hélène Villierme left Tahiti at the age of eighteen to study photography in France and Brussels. Her creative work explores customs, community, and histories in Tahiti, French Polynesia, and the Pacific region. Marie-Hélène's photographs achieve the delicate balance of transformation and continuity in different social and cultural environments, whether celebrating customs like *heiva* (dance) or contemplating the effects of nuclear testing.

## *About the Artists*

The art throughout this issue responds to a central theme: maintaining an indigenous identity within the French colonial system. These seven artists express, confront, and assert indigenous identities; they challenge and extend the visual discourse across the region and engage home communities and distant audiences. Rather than aesthetic similarities, I sought diversity. I invited women and men, well-established and emerging, who are exploring new media, mastering fine art practices, confronting social and cultural issues, and celebrating strength and beauty in Oceania.

These artists grew up in the Islands. Many are self-taught, some went abroad to art schools, and others attended Tahiti's Centre des Métiers d'Art (CMA), where students are encouraged to discover individual expression while learning techniques inherent in Polynesian and Oceanic artistic heritage. As students at CMA, Olson Teraiamano and Manaarii Tetauupu created works that pay tribute to *ti'i* (anthropomorphic figures) and contemplate the role of deities in modern life. Marie-Hélène Villierme, who left Tahiti to attend art schools in France and Belgium, uses photography and film to present a visual testimony to life in French Polynesia. TAHE, a self-taught artist, reconstitutes found objects to re-humanize abandoned spaces around Tahiti.

One of the first Kanak contemporary artists, Micheline Néporon has devoted herself to art since the late 1970s and in the 1990s attended fine arts and architectural schools in France. Denise Tiavouane and Paula Boi Gony are also self-taught artists and, like Micheline, have been included in the prestigious Asia Pacific Triennial. Together they are "big sisters" for the interdisciplinary arts organization Siapo NC Collective and use art to inspire youth to explore Kanak history and identity.

For me, the art throughout this issue highlights innovative and compelling expressions of visual culture in French Polynesia and New Caledonia with a definitive similarity: the artists are consciously working with their

communities to incite discourse about indigenous identity through art. I am grateful to the artists for their contributions and for the assistance of Ela To'omaga-Kaikilekofe, Patrice Kaikilekofe, Viri Taimana, and guest editors Bruno Saura and Léopold Mu Si Yan.

KATHERINE HIGGINS

*The art featured in this issue can be viewed in full color in the online versions.*



*Kego*, by Paula Boi Gony (New Caledonia), 2004.

Acrylic on board, 40 cm x 60 cm. Image courtesy of Ela To'omaga-Kaikilekofi and Siapo NC Collective.

Paula Boi Gony was born in the north of Koumac, a commune in the North Province. She uses visual arts to reinterpret aspects of customary Kanak society, such as traditional values and laws. Her work has been included in prestigious local and international exhibitions, including the 1994 Nouméa Biennial and the 3rd Asia Pacific Triennial.





*Human Print*, by TAHE [Tahea Drollet] (French Polynesia), 2009.

Public installation with found materials, burned wood, and aerosol paint; various dimensions. Image courtesy of the artist (<http://tahe-at-work.com/>).

Tahea Drollet, known as TAHE, is a Tahitian artist whose work confronts globalization and confidently asserts indigenous identity for wider public discourse beyond gallery walls, often through graffiti. TAHE creates socially engaged and politically activated art in public spaces such as this abandoned building. He created this installation from the rotting debris and added faces to the walls to “re-humanize” the space and leave a poetic scene for accidental visitors.



*To‘o Mata (Ancestors’ Effigy)*, by Marie-Hélène Villierme (French Polynesia), 2004.

Digital print of a medium format film (silver halide),  
60 cm x 70 cm. Image courtesy of the artist  
(<http://www.visagesdepolynesie.com/>).

Since 1990, Marie-Hélène Villierme has captured intimate moments with anonymous and well-known people in black-and-white character portraits. She skillfully uses light to infuse warmth while also achieving depth and contrast. This portrait invites viewers to reconsider the complexities of contemporary Polynesian identity.

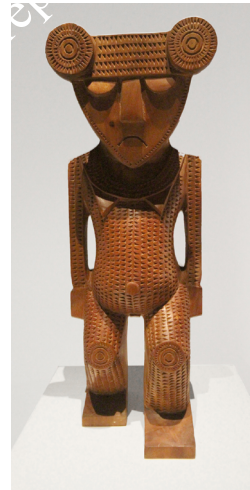


*Robe de Gran-mère* (Grandmother's Dress), by Micheline Néporon (New Caledonia), 2002.

Acrylic on banyan root, 130 cm x 70 cm. Image courtesy of Ela To'omaga-Kaikilekofe and Siapo NC Collective.

From the Unia Tribe in the Yaté region of the South Province, Micheline Néporon believes in art as a powerful means for the emancipation of Kanak women. Micheline has devoted herself to art since the late 1970s. She works in a variety of media, including natural fiber, paint, and engraving to reconcile customs and modernity. She has achieved international recognition for her art practice, and her poetry has been published. Her work is represented in public and private collections in New Caledonia, Australia, France, the Cook Islands, Vanuatu, and Mali.





*Untitled* (with detail), by Olson Teraiamano (French Polynesia), 2012.

Wood, various dimensions. Image courtesy of the artist and Centre des Métiers d'Art, Tahiti (<http://www.cma.pf/>).

Olson Teraiamano attended Centre des Métiers d'Art in Tahiti, where he created this series of *ti'i* (anthropomorphic figures), inspired by those from the Austral Islands. In these sculptures, ancient and modern coalesce to bridge the distance of nearly 250 years of history separating people of today from ancient Polynesian society. Olson has represented this series of *ti'i* in postures that are familiar to contemporaries in order to actualize them and to explore the ties that link people to their heritage and their past.



*Ti'i 3D*, by Manaarii Tetauupu (French Polynesia), 2013.

Metal mesh, various dimensions. Image courtesy of the artist and Centre des Métiers d'Art, Tahiti (<http://www.cma.pf/>).

Manaarii Tetauupu used lightweight mesh to create large *ti'i* (anthropomorphic figures), inspired by those from the Society Islands. The subtle transparency of mesh suggests a void within the figures, while spotlights create the shadows and evoke a sense of the spirits moving through the gallery space. The interplay of void and multiple dimensions prompts contemplation of the disappearance of deities and customary rituals since the adoption of Christianity in French Polynesia.

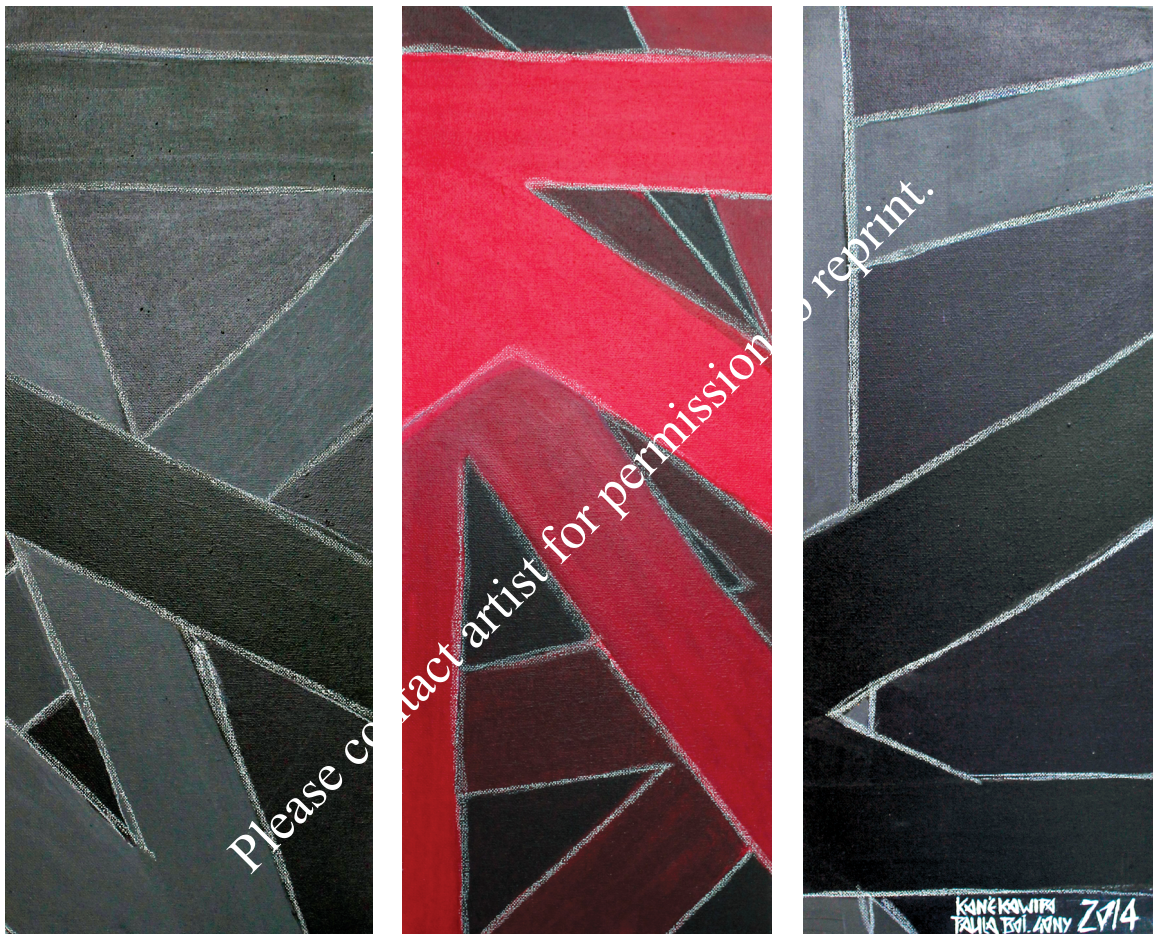




*The Look of Communication*, by Denise Tiavouane  
(New Caledonia), 2014.

Acrylic on canvas, 92 cm x 70 cm. Image courtesy of Ela To'omaga-Kaikilekofe and Siapo NC Collective.

From the tribe of St. Gabriel in Pouébo, North Province, Denise Tiavouane has been an artist for more than thirty years. She explores her cultural roots through art and works with youth to share knowledge, instill connections to traditions, and strengthen their Kanak identity. As an artist, Denise is also an educator of heritage and material culture, and whether teaching in her home community or at workshops abroad, she focuses on the importance of Island lifestyles and environments. She has exhibited independently and with the Siapo NC Collective throughout Oceania, France, Australia, and the United States.



*Kanékawipa*, by Paula Boi Gony (New Caledonia), 2014.

Acrylic on canvas, triptych, each panel 50 cm x 20 cm. Image courtesy of Ela To'omaga-Kaikilekofe and Siapo NC Collective.

In response to the music and knowledge shared at the Traditional Kanak Music Symposium in Kawipa, New Caledonia, on 17 November 2014, Paula Boi Gony created this painting and poem:

The melody . . .  
 brings me to the brink of tears,  
 and I physically feel a Shiver through my body,  
 indicating a new release of knowledge  
 that echoes deep within my soul,  
 as I realize these harmonic sounds are a gift for the new generation.